



## Iceland

### Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2002](#)

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Iceland is a constitutional republic and a parliamentary democracy in which citizens periodically choose their representatives in free and fair multiparty elections. The judiciary is independent.

Elected officials maintained effective control of the police forces, which were responsible for internal security. There were no military forces. There were no reports that security forces committed human rights abuses.

The mixed, open economy provided residents with a high standard of living. The country had a population of approximately 286,000. The gross domestic product (GDP) during the year was approximately \$8 billion; GDP growth was approximately 2 percent. Fish and other marine products accounted for about 40 percent of the country's exports. Aluminum was the second leading export.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary provided effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. Human rights monitors expressed concern about the Government's policy on dissent by foreign visitors and on protections of citizens' privacy. Violence against women remained a problem that the Government took steps to address. Some societal discrimination against women persisted, especially in the area of equal pay. There were reports of trafficking in women for prostitution. Iceland was invited as a participant to the second Ministerial Meeting of the Community of Democracies in Seoul, Republic of Korea, in November.

## RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

### Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

#### a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

#### b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

#### c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

Prison conditions generally met international standards. Most of the country's prison population of fewer than 110 inmates were held at Litla Hraun Prison, which included a state-of-the-art detention facility. However, the prison system used a substandard jail (Hegningarhusid, built in 1874), where the 16 individual cells lacked toilets and sinks. In most cases, prisoners were kept in Hegningarhusid Prison only a short time for evaluation and processing before being transferred to another facility. Some prisoners with short sentences (less than 30 days) elected to serve their time there to be closer to friends and family.

Human rights observers expressed concern about the use of illegal drugs by some inmates at Litla Hraun Prison and about the lack of social services to help inmates overcome drug addiction and prepare them for eventual release. For humanitarian reasons, authorities have not instituted stringent controls on visitation that could stop

narcotics from being smuggled into the prison.

In 2001 in response to the Council of Europe's 1999 finding that authorities used solitary confinement excessively, the Ombudsman of the Parliament investigated its use as a punishment for violations of prison regulations. He concluded that the Ministry of Justice needed to adopt clearer guidelines to prevent the arbitrary use of solitary confinement by prison authorities. By year's end, the Ministry had not done so. During the year, 94 of 108 persons placed in custody spent some time in isolation. The average time spent in isolation was approximately 14 days.

There was a separate minimum-security prison for women inmates. However, because so few women were incarcerated, some men who have been convicted of nonviolent crimes were held there as well. Juvenile offenders 15 years of age or older could be sentenced to prison terms, but the vast majority were given probation, suspended sentences, or attended a treatment program instead of going to jail. In the rare instances when juvenile offenders were incarcerated, they were held with adults since there was no separate facility for juveniles. The Government argued that such separation was not practical since the need to incarcerate a juvenile occurred infrequently.

The law allows pretrial detainees to be held with the general prison population; some human rights observers criticized this law. In 2001 the Government budgeted planning funds for a new remand prison just outside of Reykjavik; however, construction had not begun by year's end.

The Government permitted prison visits by independent human rights observers. The Icelandic Red Cross carried out regular prison visits to counsel prisoners and address their individual concerns. The independent Ombudsman of Parliament monitored prison conditions during the year.

#### d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions; however, followers of the Falun Gong religious movement complained in June that the Government detained them for several hours before admitting them to the country (see Section 2.b.). Officials said that the names of Falun Gong practitioners were gathered by police with the help of police in countries where these persons had been involved in civil disturbances.

Police may only make arrests where there is a strong suspicion of a crime having been committed or where a person refused to obey police orders to move. There were no reports of arbitrary arrests. All persons placed under arrest were presented with a form for their signature that outlines their rights and options. Within 24 hours of the arrest they appear before a judge who rules on whether they need to remain in custody during the investigation. They were entitled to legal counsel.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not employ it.

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution and the law provide for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

There were two levels of courts. A five-member Judicial Council appointed by the Minister of Justice administered the eight district courts, and the Supreme Court administers itself. All judges, at all levels, served for life.

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Juries were not used, but multijudge panels were common, particularly in the Supreme Court, which heard all appeals. Depending upon the seriousness of the case, a Supreme Court panel could have from three to seven judges. Defendants were presumed innocent and generally were tried without delay. They were provided access to legal counsel of their own choosing with sufficient time in general to prepare their defense. For defendants unable to pay attorneys' fees, the State covered the cost, as set by the court; however, defendants were required to reimburse the State. Defendants had the right to be present at their trial, to confront witnesses, and to participate in the proceedings. No groups were barred from testifying, and all testimony was treated alike. The courts had the discretion to allow the introduction of evidence obtained illegally by the police. With limited exceptions, trials were public and conducted fairly, with no official intimidation. Defendants had the right to appeal, and appeals were handled expeditiously.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Scientists and privacy advocates criticized the Ministry of Health and Social Security's national medical data program as a threat to citizens' privacy. The Government maintained access to health records under the 1998 Act on the Health Sector Database without prior affirmative consent by citizens. Its purpose was national health planning and policy. The program is expected to be completed in 2003. During the year, approximately seven percent of citizens exercised their option not to participate in the program.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press. The law bans the production, exhibition, distribution, or sale of violent motion pictures, which strive to show mistreatment or the brutal killing of men or animals. A six-member Motion Picture Review Committee, appointed by the Minister of Education and Culture, reviewed all motion pictures before they were shown and rated their suitability for children.

The country had three national daily newspapers, numerous radio stations, and two television stations that broadcast news, one of which was state owned but journalistically independent. There were also numerous Internet magazines devoted to news and political debate.

Internet access was available and unrestricted.

The Government did not restrict academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice; however, during the June visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin, the Government attempted to prohibit approximately 100-120 Falun Gong practitioners from entering the country. Authorities asserted that they lacked the capacity, including facilities and officers, to maintain order and handle the assembly of hundreds of foreign followers of the spiritual movement, which is illegal in China. On June 11, police detained approximately 70 Falun Gong followers on their arrival at Keflavik International Airport; they were released late that night. The detainees did not allege mistreatment. Falun Gong representatives demanded an apology from the Government, which met them after significant pressure. On June 14, approximately 500 persons assembled peacefully in front of the parliament building (see Section 2.c.) to protest Chinese policies and Government actions against Falun Gong demonstrators. The Government's treatment of Falun Gong members provoked heavy criticism within the country from politicians, the media, and the public.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The State financially supported and promoted the official religion, Lutheranism.

The State directly paid the salaries of the 146 ministers in the State Lutheran Church, and these ministers were considered to be public servants under the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs (MOJ); however, the Church was autonomous in its internal affairs. The Government did not pay Lutheran ministers in the nonstate churches, also known as Free Churches.

All citizens 16 years of age and older had to pay a church tax of approximately \$73 (isk 6,800) per year. For persons who were not registered as belonging to a religious organization, or who belonged to one that was not registered and recognized officially by the Government, the tax payment went to the University of Iceland, a secular institution.

The law sets specific conditions and procedures that religious organizations must follow to be registered by the Government. Such recognition was necessary for religious organizations other than the state church to receive a

per capita share of church tax funds from the Government. The law applies only to religious organizations that are seeking to be, or are already, officially recognized and registered. No restrictions or requirements were placed on unregistered religious organizations, which had the same rights as other groups in society.

By law religious instruction in Christianity is required in the public schools; however, students may be exempted.

In June Falun Gong followers from China experienced entry difficulty and detention in connection with the visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin (see Section 2.b.).

For a more detailed discussion see the 2002 International Religious Freedom Report.

#### d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

Although neither the Constitution nor the law includes provisions for the granting of refugee or asylum status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, in practice the Government adjudicated cases in accordance with their provisions. The Government cooperated with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. In May the Government adopted the Act on Foreigners, which is scheduled to enter into force in January 2003. There was concern that the 1965 Supervision of Foreigners Law gives police and customs officers at ports of entry too much discretion to deny admission to asylum seekers whose claims they deem not credible. The new law will provide guidelines on the granting of asylum and refugee status, particularly that only the Directorate of Immigration will have the discretion to deny admission to asylum seekers.

In 2001 the country became part of the Schengen free travel area, resulting in the elimination of formal border controls on the movement of persons into the country from other Schengen countries.

The Government has not formulated a policy of first asylum. Because of the country's geographic isolation, the question of first asylum rarely has arisen; however, the Directorate of Immigration and the Icelandic Red Cross (which housed and assisted asylum seekers under a Government contract) reported that 94 persons had applied for asylum by October, compared with 52 in 2001. Of these 33 were sent to other countries and 60 withdrew their applications or disappeared. At year's end, the applications of 18 persons still were being processed. Most asylum seekers applied for asylum after entering the country, rather than in the international sector (airside) of the airport. Official asylum procedures require that asylum seekers who are admitted into the country be turned over immediately to the Icelandic Red Cross and the Directorate of Immigration for processing and care. Processing of asylum cases could take 1 year or more, during which time asylum seekers were eligible for state-subsidized health care but could not work or enroll their children in public schools.

In June Falun Gong supporters visiting from China were detained for a brief period (see Section 2.b.).

The Government planned to receive 10 to 15 UNHCR-designated quota refugees during the year, substantially fewer than in previous years. However, no refugees were accepted during the year due to a reduction in funding.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

### Section 3. Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercise this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. The last elections to the Althingi, the unicameral legislature, were held in 1999.

A center-right coalition has governed since 1991. The next national elections are scheduled for May 2003. There were 23 women in the 63-member Parliament, 3 women in the 12-member Cabinet, and 2 on the 9-member Supreme Court. In April the Government gave foreigners who have resided in the country legally for 5 years or more the right to vote in municipal elections.

### Section 4. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were cooperative and responsive to their views. An independent Ombudsman, elected by the Parliament, monitors national and local authorities to ensure equal protection of persons residing in the country, whether citizens or aliens. Complaints may be lodged with the Ombudsman regarding decisions, procedures, and conduct of public officials and government agencies. The Ombudsman may demand official reports, documents, and records and may summon officials to give testimony. The Ombudsman has access to official premises. While the Ombudsman's conclusions are not binding on the authorities, his recommendations normally have been followed, and he made annual reports of his work to the Parliament. There was also a Children's Ombudsman (see Section 5).

## Section 5. Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on these factors. The population was strongly egalitarian and opposed discrimination based on any of these factors.

### Women

The law prohibits domestic violence and rape, including spousal rape. Violence against women continued to be a problem, with gang rapes reportedly becoming more frequent during the year. Police statistics indicated that the incidence of violence against women—including rape and sexual assault—was low; however, the number of women seeking assistance at the public women's shelter, the counseling center, and the emergency ward of the National Hospital indicated that many incidents go unreported. Each year about 100 women ask for temporary lodging at the women's shelter, while 300 to 400 women and children seek assistance at the counseling center. During the year, they had 410 visitors, 225 of whom came to the center for the first time.

The Government helped finance various facilities and organizations that provided assistance to victims of violence. The City of Reykjavik, in addition to partially funding such services, provided help to immigrant women in abusive relationships, offering emergency accommodation, counseling, and information on legal rights. Courts could issue restraining orders. Victims of sexual crimes were entitled, under the Criminal Code, to lawyers to advise them of their legal rights and help them pursue cases against the alleged assailants. However, a large majority of victims declined to press charges or chose to forgo trial, in part to avoid unwanted publicity in a small, tightly knit society. Some local human rights monitors also attributed underreporting to the fact that convictions traditionally yield light sentences: The maximum penalty for rape is 16 years' imprisonment, but the actual sentences imposed typically are much closer to the minimum sentence of 1 year.

Prostitution is not illegal, but it is illegal to engage in prostitution as a main source of income. It is also illegal to act as an intermediary in the sale or procurement of sex. There were reports that some foreign women were trafficked to work as striptease dancers (see Section 6.f.).

The rate of participation by women in the labor market was high at over 80 percent. In part this reflected the country's comprehensive system of subsidized day care, which made work outside the home more affordable and convenient for parents. The law requires that preference be given to hiring and promoting women in areas where they are underrepresented, as long as they are equal in all other respects to male job seekers. Despite laws that require equal pay for equal work, a pay gap existed between men and women. According to one of the largest labor unions, women on average earned 16 percent less than men in 2001. A 12 percent difference in pay may be attributable to the fact that men work on average 4.2 hours more a week than women.

Fathers had the same right as mothers to paid leave upon the birth of a child. Under the law, which is expected to be fully implemented in 2003, both mothers and fathers would be allowed to take 3 months of paid leave (at 80 percent of the normal salary), with an additional 3 months that can be taken by either parent or shared between them. Previously a mother was given 6 months of paid maternity leave and the father just 2 weeks. The new leave requirements apply equally to the public and private sectors.

### Children

The Government was strongly committed to children's rights and welfare; it amply funded a system of public education and health care. School attendance was compulsory through the age of 15 and free through public university level. Approximately 85 percent of students continued to upper secondary education, which was financed completely by the Government. The Government provided free prenatal and infant medical care, as well as heavily subsidized childcare. The Children's Ombudsman, appointed by the Prime Minister but independent from the Government, fulfilled its mandate to protect children's rights, interests, and welfare by, among other

things, exerting influence on legislation, government decisions, and public attitudes. When investigating complaints, the Ombudsman had access to all of the country's public and private institutions and associations that house children or otherwise care for them. However, the Ombudsman's conclusions were not legally binding on parties to disputes.

The government-funded Agency for Child Protection coordinated the work of approximately 40 committees around the country that were responsible for managing child protection issues (for example, adoption and foster care) in their local areas. In June, Law number 80/2002 article 7 went into effect, raising the minimum size of child protection areas from 200 to 1,500 inhabitants. The change was made to address concerns about conflicts of interest and improper influence. The law also took away the committees' power to terminate parental rights and provided that longer-term care decisions must be adjudicated in court. The Agency also operated eight treatment centers and a diagnostic facility for abused and troubled minors.

There was no societal pattern of abuse directed against children. In an effort to improve the rate of prosecution of child sexual abuse and lessen the trauma to the child, the Government established the Children's Assessment Center (Barnahus). The center, which handled 100 to 125 cases annually, was intended to create a safe and secure environment where child victims feel more comfortable talking about what happened to them. The center brought together police, prosecutors, judges, doctors, and officials from child protection services. Under a 2000 Supreme Court ruling, a district court judge could hold an investigatory interview in the courthouse rather than at the center. Human rights observers criticized this ruling as a step backward in the protection of children's rights.

Human rights observers also criticized the establishment of a national health database that included children. Medical records of children under the age of 18 automatically were entered into the database unless their legal guardians requested otherwise. On reaching the age of 18, a person could elect to discontinue their inclusion in the database, but information already stored could not be withdrawn (see Section 1.f.).

#### Persons with Disabilities

There was no reported discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or the provision of other state services. The law provides that such persons have the right to all common national and municipal services and provides that they be given assistance to make it possible for them to live and work normally in society. The law also provides that persons with disabilities receive preference for a government job when they are qualified equally, or more qualified, than regular applicants.

Building regulations require that public accommodations and government buildings, including elevators, be accessible to persons in wheelchairs. The regulations also specify that one percent of parking spaces (a minimum of one space) be reserved for persons with disabilities. The regulations also specify that, to the extent possible, the sidewalk outside the main entrance of such a building be heated so that it remains clear of ice and snow. Violations of these regulations are punishable by a fine or a jail sentence of up to 2 years; however, the main association for persons with disabilities has complained that enforcement is lax and that penalties rarely are assessed for noncompliance.

In 2000 the Supreme Court ruled that the reduction of social security payments to persons with disabilities based on the income of their spouses violated constitutional protections regarding equality and support for persons with disabilities. In response, Parliament in 2001 increased the minimum payment to persons with disabilities who have able-bodied spouses, but continued to subject benefits to a modified means test. The Association of Disabled Persons protested that the legislation did not comply with the Supreme Court ruling and challenged the law in court. The case was on appeal at year's end.

While significant progress has been made in addressing the concerns and needs of persons with physical disabilities, some mental health advocates criticized the Government for not devoting sufficient attention and resources to the care of persons with mental disabilities.

#### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There is no law that prohibits organizations that promote and incite racial discrimination. The Prime Minister and others expressed concern that the rapidly increasing number of foreigners entering the country to meet labor shortages could lead to future problems, especially in the event of an economic downturn. According to the National Statistical Office, at the end of 2001, 9,850 foreigners were living in the country, approximately 3 percent of the population. Many temporary workers come from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and the Directorate of Immigration expected most to seek to remain permanently rather than return to their

countries of origin. The term nýbúar--newcomer--has taken on a negative connotation according to human rights observers and is increasingly applied to immigrants of color. Asian women in public at night reportedly were taunted on the assumption that they were prostitutes, and minority children were teased for allegedly having been purchased on the Internet. In September a Gallup Poll revealed that only 27 percent of citizens aged 45 to 54 had positive feelings toward foreigners; however, nearly half the 16- to 24-year-olds had positive feelings.

The City of Reykjavik, together with three other municipalities and the Icelandic Red Cross, operated an Intercultural Center that helps foreigners adjust to living in the country. The center offered free translation, education, research, and advice services. The Ministry of Social Affairs operated a Multicultural Center in Isafjordur that facilitated the interaction of citizens with foreign nationals and provided support services for foreign nationals in rural municipalities.

Human rights observers continued to express concern about a tiny ultranationalist organization, Iceland for Icelanders, which was founded in 1997 with the goal of limiting the further settlement of foreigners in the country to persons of European origin. In 2001 the Supreme Court fined the deputy leader of the organization for making disparaging remarks about foreigners in a newspaper interview.

## Section 6. Worker Rights

### a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides for the right of workers to establish unions, draw up their own constitutions and rules, choose their own leaders and policies, and publicize their views, and workers exercised these rights. Labor unions were independent of the Government and political parties. Approximately 85 percent of all eligible workers belonged to unions.

Labor courts effectively adjudicated disputes over contracts and over the rights provided by the law, which prohibits antiunion discrimination. By law employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination are required to reinstate workers fired for union activities; however, in practice the charges often were difficult to prove.

Unions were permitted to affiliate internationally, and they took active part in Nordic, European, and other international trade union bodies.

### b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Union membership is not impeded by law or practice. Employers were required to withhold union dues (one percent of gross pay) from the pay of all employees, whether or not they were union members, to help support disability, strike and pension funds and other benefits to which all workers are entitled.

Trade unions and management organizations periodically negotiate collective bargaining agreements that set specific terms for workers' pay, hours, and other conditions. Collective bargaining agreements were negotiated in 2000, and most are scheduled to expire in 2003 and 2004. The Government played a minor role in the bargaining process, providing mediation assistance in a few cases (through the State Mediator's Office).

The Icelandic Federation of Labor (IFL) lost two lawsuits in 2001 in which it charged that Parliament's intervention in the fish industry strike violated the seamen's constitutional rights to associate freely and to bargain collectively (see Section 6.a.). In December 2001, the IFL made the same complaints to the International Labor Organization (ILO). The Government answered ILO questions in August, and the case remained open at the end of the year.

With the exception of limited categories of workers in the public sector whose services are essential to public health or safety, unions have the right to strike. There were no strikes during the year.

There were no export processing zones.

### c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children, and there were no reports that such practices occurred. Work permit practices left newly arrived foreign workers vulnerable to abuse by employers (see Section 6.e.).

#### d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children younger than age 16 in factories, on ships, or in other places that are hazardous or require hard labor; this prohibition is observed in practice. Children 14 or 15 years old may be employed part time or during school vacations in light, nonhazardous work. Their work hours must not exceed the ordinary work hours of adults in the same occupation. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration enforced child labor regulations effectively.

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

No minimum wage is mandated by law, but the minimum wages negotiated in various collective bargaining agreements applied automatically to all employees in those occupations, whether they were union members or not. Labor contracts provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

The standard legal workweek was 40 hours, which included nearly 3 hours of paid breaks a week. Work exceeding 8 hours in a workday must be compensated as overtime. Workers were entitled to 11 hours of rest within each 24-hour period and to a day off every week. Under defined special circumstances, the 11-hour rest period could be reduced to 8 hours, but workers would then have to be compensated with 1.5 hours of rest for every hour received less than 11 hours. The day off could be postponed by 1 week, in which case the worker had a right to 2 additional hours off the following week.

Health and safety standards were set by Parliament and administered and enforced by the Ministry of Social Affairs through its Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which could close down workplaces until safety and health standards were met. Workers had a collective, not an individual, right to refuse to work in a place that did not meet occupational safety and health criteria. Firing workers who report unsafe or unhealthy conditions was illegal.

The Government's practice of issuing work permits for newly arrived foreign workers or refugees to the employer rather than to the employee made workers vulnerable to abuse by the employer in some instances (see Section 5).

#### f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit specifically trafficking in persons, although a number of legal provisions may be used to prosecute such cases. There were reports that women were trafficked to and within the country.

Article 206 of the Constitution specifies imprisonment for a conviction of facilitating a minor's entry or departure from the country if the purpose was commercial sex or if the victim was unaware of the genuine purpose, as through fraud. Criminal procedures also provide that victims may testify at government expense against traffickers. However, no person has ever been arrested or charged with trafficking in persons.

The 1984 Extradition Law provides that a person may be extradited as long as the offense involved would be punishable by more than 1 year's imprisonment. Article 206 of the general penal code provides for a sentence of up to 4 years imprisonment for an offense tantamount to trafficking in persons; therefore the law would allow the extradition of persons who were charged with trafficking in other countries.

Evidence of trafficking has been reported by police, NGOs, researchers and foreign diplomats, mainly in connection with foreign women who entered the country to work in striptease clubs. There was an assumption that some women travelling to Iceland to work in the country's striptease clubs were victims of trafficking. Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and the former Soviet Union were the main countries of origin for these dancers, but there were no statistics on the number or origin of women actually trafficked. While most attention has been focused on the country as a possible destination point for trafficked women, there have been some cases during the year that indicated that the country was also being used as a transit point for the movement of trafficked women between Europe and North America. There were no reliable estimates on how many women this may have involved.

Parliament in 2000 closed a loophole that allowed striptease dancers to enter the country as artists and perform without a work permit for up to 4 weeks. Subsequently, in order to work as a striptease dancer, any foreigner from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) was required first to obtain a work permit, which was typically valid for 3 months. Due to the action of government authorities in denying work and residence permits, the influx of nightclub dancers from outside the EEA slowed considerably in the second half of 2001. During the year the



number of foreign dancers plummeted following a ban by Reykjavik authorities on private dances that served as a front for prostitution. At the end of the year, club owners were contesting the ban in the courts.

There were two cases since 2001 of foreign striptease dancers complaining to police that a club owner had pressured them into prostitution. The police investigation, which involved a total of six women from Estonia and Denmark, concluded without any charges being brought against the club owner. Foreign embassies reported that they had helped to repatriate women who realized upon arrival that they had been deceived concerning the work that they were expected to perform. Many employers required their dancers to live in small, crowded group houses provided by the clubs. Some clubs allegedly restricted their dancers' movement, enforced a curfew, and kept dancers under constant surveillance, confiscating their passports and airline tickets and warning them not to fraternize with persons outside work. The club owners reportedly limited the dancers' stay in the country to minimize the number of contacts that the women could make, moving them quickly to the next country and job.

Victims of trafficking could seek help at the women's shelter, counseling center, and hospital, all of which were government funded. There were no domestic NGOs dedicated solely to assisting victims of trafficking, nor was there an established government assistance program. Some NGOs provided government-supported counseling and shelter to women and children who were victims of violence or sexual abuse. The Icelandic Human Rights Center, which is also government funded, assisted with trafficking cases and made referrals (see Section 5).

There were no ongoing information, public awareness, or other antitrafficking programs during the year.